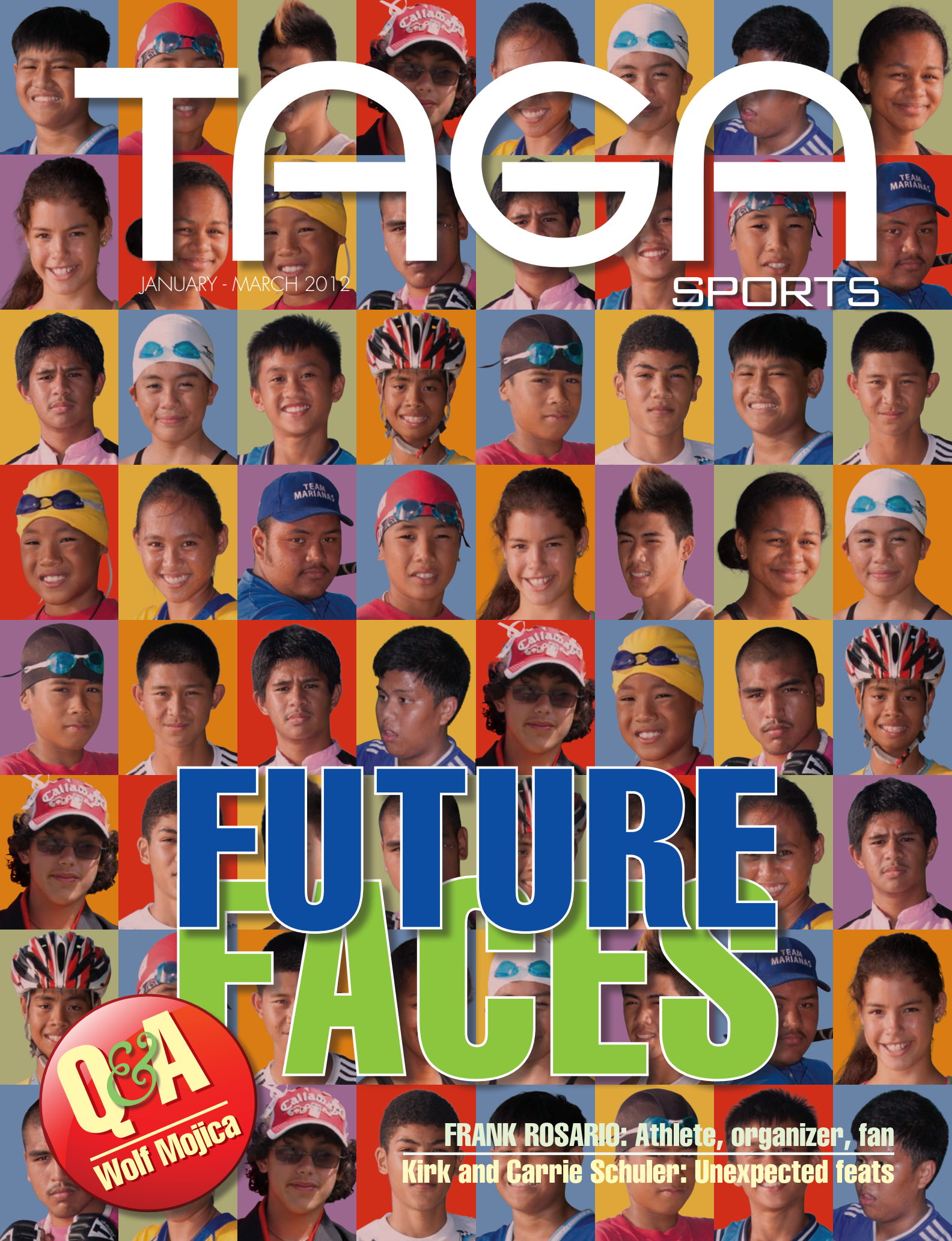
TAGA
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FRANK ROSARIO: Athlete, organizer, fan
Kirk and Carrie Schuler: Unexpected feats

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EDITOR'S NOTE

I have to confess. The kids featured in this edition of TAGA *Sports* have got me beat. At such tender ages, they have already accomplished more than what I have ever done when it comes to sports. I was, and still is, a geek. I've made some half-hearted attempts at running, walking (when my dog Jack was still with me), and swimming but, truth be told, I'd rather just settle in with a good book and a hot cup of coffee than go chasing after some ball.

Just to give you an idea, at 12, Tammy Ackerman is already an accomplished tennis player. At 12, I was a sixth grader checking and correcting my classmates' essay assignments. And they didn't even have to bully me to do it for them either! Yeah, I know. Another 12-year-old, CJ Morales, is already a standout baller and is a fixture at the Garapan basketball court. When I was 12, my favorite hangout was the library. Up-and-coming cyclist Erico Castro is 13 and is already nipping at the heels of his more mature counterparts. At 13, I was a short and skinny high school freshman. At the time, soccer was mandatory for all freshmen. I'd get so anxious each time I'd see the ball heading my way. Thankfully, nobody would pass the ball to me, perhaps knowing I would be flattened by the opposing team.

At 15, Jeraldine Castillo is already a force to reckon with in both basketball and soccer. At 15 I remember my dad yelling at me to put down the book I was reading and go to the local basketball court and play with the other "normal" kids. I must have been a perplexing child for my dad, who just wanted to have a typical boy who'd be out the door as soon as summer kicks in, not cooped up inside the house with a stack of books to read. It wasn't until college that I finally found a sport I love: swimming. I loved it so much that I took the course four times!

The point is, the athletes featured in this edition are lucky in that they found the sport they love at such young ages. Healthy lifestyles are all about balance and these kids are showing us that it's possible, that it is practical, that it actually works. These athletes are among the cream of the crop and manage to shine brightly in sports while managing their academics and putting in the hours necessary to make good grades. There's plenty of adults who couldn't say they same thing of themselves, myself included!

We hope that you will like this latest edition of TAGA *Sports* and may the stories between these pages inspire our readers to go on their own quests for personal excellence. For comments, violent reactions, criticisms, and suggestions for future issues, shoot us an email at editor@saipantribune.com and we'd be sure to consider them in future editions.

JAYVEE VALLEJERA
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Editor

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COVER ART
Future Faces of NMI Sports

Photography by
JESSIE PAGSINOHIN

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28 Three years was all it took for husband and wife Kirk and Carrie Schuler to accomplish many things that they never expected to be doing.

WRITERS BLOC

MARK ALEXIS P. RABAGO

Aside from winning a Michael Jackson dance contest when he was around 10 and not counting being a mainstay in an obscure children's show when he was 5, the other achievement Mark is proud of when he was young was winning a poetry-writing contest in his sophomore year of high school. That led to an assistant editor gig in his high school's short-lived newspaper.

ROSELYN MONROYO

In grade school, while her cousins would take naps in the afternoon, Roselyn would sneak out to shoot basketball in a neighbor's backyard. Early in high school, she would play with her cousins using a makeshift goal inside her aunt's living room and once broke an ornament while diving for a loose ball. She turned down an offer to play in college, but joined several practice sessions for a team competing in intramurals to make up for her absences in early morning P.E. classes.

CATHERINE R. PERRY

Catherine was about 15 years old when she had to write an essay for English class about what she expected to be in 10 years. "I said that I would be either an Air Force pilot or a writer." She ended up majoring in Broadcasting and, just about 10 years later, writing for press secretary Frank Rosario in the CNMI Governor's Public Information Office.

WALTER CEPEDA SUTHERLAND

About 15 years ago Walter was just starting to get serious playing his favorite sport, baseball. He also played a lot of basketball, street hockey, golf, some recreational bowling, and did a whole lot of camping; he even snuck in a couple seasons of football before high school. In fact, about the only sport he never dove into was wrestling because his mom didn't want her baby to get hurt.

Email letters to the editor to editor@saipantribune.com or mail to PMB 34, P.O. Box 10001, Saipan MP 96950. Submissions to TAGA *Sports* must include the writer's name, village address (no P.O. boxes), and daytime phone or mobile number. Letters may be edited for length and clarity and may be published or used in any medium. All submissions become the property of the publication and will not be returned.

FUTUREFACES of NMISPORTS

JAYVEE VALLEJERA
TAGA *Sports* Editor ;

R.J. Macaranas, Tammy Ackerman, CJ Morales, Ian Rogolifoi, Rachel Abrams, Erico Castro, Shane Alvarez, the Yanai brothers. Watch now because in a few years' time, these names will be by-words in the annals of Commonwealth sports. These blossoming talents, and a few others, are the local sporting world's prodigies, if you will, beginning to carve out a name for themselves at very young ages, cutting a wide swath through local and off-island competitions and, more often than not, even besting much older competitors.

This edition of TAGA *Sports* focuses the spotlight on these up-and-coming youth athletes to kick off 2012. The start of a new year is always a good time to take stock and plan for the future and these youthful athletes are already on the radar for what will shape the future of CNMI sports. Only time will tell if these promising talents will go on to more lustrous heights or peak early but TAGA *Sports* believes that of more importance is the fact that these youngsters have chosen at such a young age to incorporate sports into their daily lives, giving lie to the myth that it can't be done, what with TV, video games, and the Internet competing for the youth's short attention spans.

These kids excel not only in the sport of their choice but also in school, a

recurrent theme during this magazine's interviews with them. Engaging in any sporting activity teaches children not only how to play but also about how to live balanced lives, take responsibility for one's actions, how to prioritize and to budget one's time, and other life skills that would later help them when they go out into the rough and tumble world of real life. They play hard but they also study hard, very much aware of the rule that academics must come first before anything else.

Their early accomplishments are also valuable markers for their growth as individuals and their successes and failures are important lessons on how to take pride in one's triumphs, how to be graceful in defeat, and how to be magnanimous in victory. Proper parenting can only do so much and it is in being involved in sports that lessons such as these are effectively driven to the point without having to nag.

Whether intended or not, these future faces of CNMI sports are outstanding models for their peers and their individual victories make for a compelling case why children should be exposed to sports as early as possible—to give them a head start on what it means to live healthy, positive, and uplifting lives.

Top, from left to right, Kaito, Ryuto, and Hiroto Yanai, and Angel De Jesus join, bottom from left to right, Michael Mancao, Rafael Jones, Ian Rogolifoi, Rachel Abrams, Tammy Ackerman, Jeraldine Castillo, CJ Morales, Mark Venus, Erico Castro, Shane Alvarez, Raphael Zapanta, and Jehn Joyner for a group photo at the IT&E playground at Pakpak Beach Park in San Antonio.

JESSIE PAGSINOHIN

Tammy Ackerman

A force to be reckoned with

ROSELYN B. MONROYO
TAGA *Sports* Staff Writer

Tammy Ackerman is the most dedicated tennis player in the CNMI today, according to the Commonwealth's long-time coach, Jeff Race.

" I joke with her dad that he needs to bring wild horses to drag her off the court at night. She is really a force to be reckoned with," Race said.

"Although she established herself as the No. 1 U12 player in the Pacific at the POJC last August, she has really made huge strides in improving her game since then. For instance, her net game was very weak just a few months ago. Her volley skills were not strong and she frequently had opponents on the ropes from the backcourt but couldn't finish them off. Since then she has really dedicated herself to improving this aspect of her game. Now when she gets a short ball she moves right in for the kill," the CNMI mentor added.

Two years ago, Race would not have had this assessment, with Ackerman slowing down on tennis to be with her ailing mother.

"In early 2009 until late 2010, my mom had treatment for her breast cancer. I had to accompany her to Thailand. During those times, I was not that enthusiastic about tennis, but in 2011, with strong support from my mom, my interest in tennis rekindled," the 12-year-old player said.

Tennis was not Ackerman's first love, though; dancing was. She began with ballet at age 2 and that led to hip hop, jazz, and ballroom until she was 9. She also does middle distance races and had her share of wins, even beating veteran runner Mamiko Oshima-Berger in a fundraiser last year.

She started 2011 with a U12 singles win and mixed up doubles (with Peter Loyola) in the Coconut Classic and a string of victories came in ensuing months, including the women's doubles 3.0 (with Joy Minor) and women's 3.0 and U12 singles in the PIC tournament, and the U12 singles in the CNMI national championship.

Ackerman's strong showing in 2011 earned her a slot on the CNMI Team that competed in the North Pacific Qualifying Tournament against Guam, Palau, and the Federated States of Micronesia. In the NPQ in Guam, she finished third after losing to teammate Negahr Rastguiy and Palau's Ayana Rengiil. Then in the Pacific Oceania Junior Championship in Fiji, Ackerman had her payback when she defeated both Rengiil and Rastguiy to take the No. 1 ranking in the region's U12 division.

The Saipan Community School student was not done yet after her POJC triumph, as a few months later, she received a scholarship offer from the prestigious Regional Training Center in Fiji. She will be the first CNMI junior tennis player to study and train in the RTC for a year.

"This is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity and I am very excited about it. With my family, teachers, and friends supporting my decision, I hope to go far," said Ackerman, who started picking up tubes and tennis balls when she was 7 before playing in her first tournament and winning in 2008.

Besides going to Fiji, Ackerman is also scheduled to leave for Australia on Jan. 1, 2012, to compete in a series of tournaments and her family is wishing her success in her journey.

"With Tammy leaving her home for one year, the mother, the brother, and I had already suffered a pain that cannot be expressed. Nevertheless, this is Tammy's own dream. Our deep love for her supports the possibility of a defining moment in this young women's life," Tammy's father, Paul, said.

COACH'S TAKE

Jeff Race, Pacific Oceania David Cup non-playing captain

What's the best part of her game: Tammy has a lot of weapons, being big and fast. Her first serve is big, second serve consistent, forehand and backhand both very powerful. I like working with her as she is very coachable.

What part needs improvement: Her net game was very weak just a few months ago. Her volley skills were not strong and she frequently had opponents on the ropes from the backcourt but couldn't finish them off. Since then she has really dedicated herself to improving this aspect of her game.

FAST FACTS

Full Name: Tammy S. Ackerman
Birthday: May 7, 1999
Height: 5.5"
Weight: 103 lbs
Parents: Boonlert and Paul Ackerman
Sibling: Dylan
Village: Papago
School: Saipan Community School
Favorite sportswear and racquet: Adidas and Babolat

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Athletics boast of two rising stars

ROSELYN B. MONROYO
TAGA *Sports* Staff Writer

RACHEL ABRAMS

Rachel Abrams is the first CNMI runner to make it to the finals of the Pacific Games, racing with the best sprinters in the region during the 200-meter event in the 2011 Pacific Games in New Caledonia.

That is quite an achievement for an athlete who, in her first race six years ago, had no clue about how to run on a track oval.

"When I was 9, I raced in the 100-meter run for Koblerville Elementary School and I remembered asking the race announcer so many questions. I didn't know which lane to start and where to stop," Abrams recalled.

She won that first race and she remembers how she sprinted so fast when the starting gun went off. Abrams' explosive start, according to Elias Rangamar, CNMI athletics head coach, makes this 16-year-old athlete a power sprinter.

"We're grooming her to race for the CNMI in the 60-meter and 100-meter sprints," said Rangamar.

Abrams is a product of the NMA All Schools Championships, competing in running and jumping events of the annual tournament. She is one of the few All Schools participants who has won the top athlete award in three divisions—elementary, junior high school (with Hopwood Junior High School), and high school (Marianas High School). This Commonwealth sprinter also played for the CNMI women's basketball team that won the silver medal in the 2010 Micronesian Basketball Tournament in Palau.

Abrams' progress from curious runner to competitive sprinter earned her a spot in the CNMI Team that competed in New Caledonia last summer. It was her first off-island event in track and she made history for the Commonwealth when she timed in at 27.46 seconds in the 200-meter run, finished second in her heat, and advanced to the finals.

The MHS student missed placing in the Top 3 in the finals of the 200-meteer race but had an eventful run in the medal round.

"I was soaking wet due to rain, water was coming out of my shoes, and I was numb because it was very cold. But I still ran as fast as I could with my teeth chattering," said Abrams, who still posted a decent time in the finals at 27.48 seconds. "I had a very good year in 2011 and I will continue to work harder at the track to improve my times."

FAST FACTS

Full Name: Rachel Dominique Abrams
Birthday: July 13 1995
Height: 5"8
Weight: 136 lbs
Parents: Adela Kapileo and Donald Abrams
Siblings: Serena and Leilam
Village: Koblerville
School: Marianas High School:
Favorite sportswear: tights and basketball shorts

MICHAEL MANCAO

Veteran runner Ketson "Jack" Kabiriel had earlier expressed plans of slowing down and letting fresh legs take over road racing in the CNMI.

Kabiriel may now pass the baton to Michael Mancao, who has been joining middle and long distance races on Saipan for the past two years and has his fair share of wins, topping the 4.3-mile fun run in the 2010 Powerade Banzai race, the 2010 All Schools Cross Country Championship, and the U18 division of the 4.2-mile Turkey Trot run last year.

"Michael will blossom in road and cross-country races. He has a great stamina for races outside the track," Rangamar said.

Like Abrams, Mancao is also a perennial participant in the annual All Schools meet and credits older brother, Matthew, for encouraging him to try running. The siblings both did last year's Turkey Trot with Michael beating Matthew by about three minutes.

The younger Mancao started competing when he was 10 and remembers not placing in the Top 3 in the 200-meter, 400-meter, and 800-meter events.

"However, that did not stop me from running. I kept pushing myself," Michael said.

After a few years, making it to the podium was a gimme for the MHS student.

"When I started running hard, people notice how far I am from the pack. In most long distance races, I would come first and way ahead of others, so they gave me the name 'blow,' somewhat like blow-out," he said.

FAST FACTS

Full Name: Michael Hu Mancao
Birthday: April 1, 1995
Height: 5'7"
Weight: 124 lbs
Parents: Florencio Mancao and Juan Hu
Siblings: Matthew and Maryann
Village: Garapan
School: Marianas High School
Favorite sportswear: Nike, Underarmmor, and Asics

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Middle Road

For CJ Morales, sports is in the blood

WALTER CEPEDA SUTHERLAND
TAGA *Sports* Staff Writer

FAST FACTS

Name:	Christian Joseph Morales
Age:	12
Birthday:	May 16, 1999
Height:	4'10"
Weight:	110 lbs
Parents:	Joseph and Susan Morales
Village:	Chalan Kanoa
School:	Hopwood Junior High School
Hobbies:	Volleyball, listening to music

Favorite brands: Jordan, Nike
Favorite NBA player: Chicago Bulls' Derrick Rose

Twelve-year-old CJ Morales has been playing basketball with the Rollers Basketball Club for just under two years and has already developed a reputation as one of the most talented young cagers on Saipan.

His love of sports comes from his parents, Joseph and Susan, who are both former athletes. He grew up watching his dad on the hard court, while his mother is a former volleyball player.

"One day I was at Garapan court and the kids asked me if I wanted to play. I made a lot of friends through basketball and have been having a great time ever since," said Morales.

Morales, who plays shooting guard for RBC's IT&E Angels, was born and raised on Saipan and likes basketball because it is a team sport. He is a natural shooter with slick ball-handling skills. One of the most remarkable things about his game is that he knows when to shoot and when to pass. He is a strong leader on the court and makes the players around him better. Morales already makes mature decisions with the ball and does not force shots. He protects the ball very well and, win or lose, is known for good sportsmanship.

"I like to mix it up to keep my opponents guessing and I don't really get nervous in pressure situations and try to keep my confidence up," he smiled.

COACH'S TAKE:

Rollers Basketball Club's Joe Diaz

"CJ just finished his second year with the RBC and although he showed early signs of talent last year, the improvement in his game really shone through in 2011. I remember when he first arrived that he had speed and the will to jump in there and play. We worked with his shooting motion and noticed that he is a fast learner from a coach's standpoint. When we draw up and practice plays he catches on fast to why we are telling the players to adjust to a specific strategy in real-time game situations."

CONTINUED ON PAGE 12▶

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ERICO CASTRO

The fastest kid on two wheels

MARK RABAGO
TAGA *Sports* Associate Editor

What a difference a year makes for up-and-coming cyclist Erico Castro.

Before 2010, Castro wasn't really sure what sport best suited him but after joining and winning his age group in several races in 2011, there's no doubt that the 13-year-old was born to ride a bike at very high speeds.

Since finishing fifth in the first cycling competition he joined—the 2010 Northern Passage—this Lance Armstrong fan has notched age-group first place finishes in the PIC Bike for Life, Saipan Cycling Association MTB & Road Race II, Butch's Journey to XTERRA World Fundraiser, Ride 'Round The Ridge, and most recently the 2011 Hell of Marianas 100-kilometer race.

The latter saw Erico win the individual mountain bike 14-24 age group after crossing the finish line faster than the champion of the road bike division.

Castro's first bike was a Huffy Bike his dad bought from Joeten Susupe. The older Castro said he bought the bike after his efforts to get his son interested in soccer failed.

"My dad told me that biking is really fun and is a good exercise. When I tried it out it was fun, so I started to like biking," said Erico about his first encounters with the sport of cycling.

Ricky's perseverance in finding a sport for his son soon paid off and in no time Erico was joining local races left and right.

Erico was scared and pretty nervous when he started out competing but as time went on, cycling became as easy as riding—what else—a bike.

Memorable races

In his relatively young cycling career, Erico counts the Seventh Day Adventist race and the Bike for Life as his most memorable races so far, the 60-kilometer SDA event being the first time the Hopwood Junior High School student joined in the open competition. He wound up third in the 45-and-under division.

In the PIC race, Erico initially couldn't believe he was the first to cross the finish line. That was also the first time he took part in a long race, in this case 30 kilometers.

Of all the bike courses on Saipan, this youth biker always looks forward to tackling the route up Mt. Tapochao because of its sheer beauty.

Like any other student involved in sports, Erico understands that cycling should always take a backseat to his studies. "I study my lessons. That's the No.1 priority," he assured.

His dad couldn't agree more. "I always remind him that studies is the No. 1 priority. On weekdays he can bike after school as long as no homework or take home lessons are left undone. On weekends, he can have his time and practice as long as all his schoolwork is done," said Ricky.

Erico says nothing compares to placing first in the open competition and this, aside from representing the CNMI in off-island competitions, remains one of his dreams in the sport of cycling.

Ricky supports his son's dreams and more. "Like many parents, I want my son to become a lawyer, doctor, engineer, or just to be successful in any chosen field. But I also dream for Erico to become a successful athlete. Having a world-class cyclist in the family is equally important, too." TS

FAST FACTS

Full name: Erico Mari Castro
Birthday: April 11, 1998
Height: 5'6"
Weight: 120 lbs
Parents: Ricardo and Marissa Castro
Siblings: Marco Paulo and Mark Enzo
Village: Chalan Kanoa
School: Hopwood Jr. High School
Favorite sportswear: Scott
Favorite brand of bike: Titus and Cannondale
Hobbies: Biking and hanging out with friends

COACH'S TAKE

Veteran cyclist and 36-45 age group winner of 2011 Hell of Marianas Bob Ferrer

What's the best part of his game: He is still young and has years to develop physically and mentally. He is also like a sponge and absorbs all that is taught him. He has it in him to be the next Butch Sublemente and Lewie Tenorio of cycling. The sky is the limit for Erico.

What part needs improvement: He needs to slow down sometimes and not give his all every time, especially during start of races. He has to understand that it's not how you start but how you finish. He also has to learn that safety should be the utmost importance in every race. You may be fast but if you're reckless, you won't last in cycling that long.

▶FROM PAGE 10

Morales stands out in the U12 division and has shown multiple times that he can run with the older players. Earlier this year, he almost upset RBC's U15 Micronesian Brokers Inc. team on two occasions. The IT&E Angles may have come up short both times, but his individual performance overshadowed every other player on the floor.

Last September, in a U15 Saipan Rotary Club Youth Basketball League matchup against rival MBI, he buried four 3-pointers for 12 points before shrugging off a tough 30-32 loss after his buzzer-beater clanged off the rim. Then Morales led IT&E as it forced double overtime against MBI in their second meeting. He was kept in check early in that game but still led his team with a dozen markers, three of which came from behind the arc just as the bell rang in the first overtime period.

Morales also boasts a win in FIBA's 3-on-3 tournament, runner-up in RBC's Halloween Trick or Treat 3-on-3 caging, and he just finished leading his U12 IT&E Rollers squad to a championship in Guam's Take Care Thanksgiving Hoop Fest Tournament and was selected as the most valuable player.

When not at practice you can find him in Chalan Kanoa or Susupe in the neighborhood courts.

Besides his father, Morales' other mentors include RBC's head coach Joe Diaz, Paul Camacho, and Zack Babauta. Camacho offers him shooting instructions and he enjoys studying Babauta's ball-handling skills.

Aside from basketball, Morales enjoys language arts classes in school, playing recreational volleyball in his free time, listening to a variety of pop music and, while he is admittedly not a good fisherman, enjoys gorging on the finished product. TS

To all athletes, organizations, and leagues:

Happy New Year!

We wish you the best of luck in the sporting world this year and support your efforts to make the CNMI healthier and more competitively recognized in 2012!

From the TSL Foundation

Tan Siu Lin Foundation

IAN ROGOLIFOI homers for a win

WALTER CEPEDA SUTHERLAND

TAGA *Sports* Staff Writer

Ian Rogolifoi, a 15-year-old sophomore, was known as the "Big Papi" of the age group when he played for the Saipan Little League's junior division IT&E Fielders, probably because of his height—he stands a stout 5'9" made all of muscle.

The youngest of five boys and three girls, Ian has been hanging around the ball field at the Oleai Sports Complex since he was a little kid and started playing at 7 as a catcher. He then moved over to first base at 10 and has developed a reputation as a ferocious power hitter since day one.

"I like baseball because it's a big tradition from both sides of my family and the game just comes naturally to me," he said.

It's no surprise as his father Tony is a Hall of Famer of the sport in addition to being a big asset in the local baseball community overall. His pops also had a successful basketball career back in the day and his mom, Rose, has many past baseball players in her family as well. She has ties in Tanapag and her brothers and father all played for years and later became managers.

Ian has already made two Little League World Series Asia-Pacific Regional Championship appearances in 2009 and 2011. His 2009 major division squad made it all the way to the semifinal round.

In his final junior division year this past season, Ian jacked a towering homerun over the right center fence on Francisco "Tan Ko" Palacios Ballfield. He is one of only two junior leaguers to accomplish the feat, BJ Sablan being the first many years ago. His team would go on to win the championship, 9-3, over the BTS-Martha's Store Survivors. He also won the 2011 home derby.

Ian was the lead off batter for his team last season, not for his speed, but because of his consistency at the plate.

His favorite player is Major League Baseball's David Ortiz of the Boston Red Sox. "I like [Ortiz] because he is a soft spoken player that does his talking with his bat. We are also both left-handed too and I like his big swing," said Ian.

Ian's dad is his primary mentor along with his four brothers, particularly "Tony Boy," and his coach Patrick Tenorio (and sons), Baseball Confederation of Oceania development officer Ray Brown, and former player Mike Pangelinan.

Back in 2010, Ian was fortunate enough to attend an Oceania Training camp instructed by Brown in Guam and learned proper swing techniques, fielding methods, and even some pitching tips. Brown also visited Saipan earlier that year during the SLL season and Ian took in as much as he could from Brown's knowledge of the game.

Tenorio, meanwhile, has been his coach for three years and the two have developed a trusting relationship.

He plans on sticking with the fielders for the remainder of his SLL career, but is considering skipping the senior class and jumping right in with the big leaguers if SLL organizers give him the green light.

Off the field, Ian helps keep the scorebook. "I'd rather be on the field, but I try to help out my dad as much as I can because he often gets spread thin on the baseball scene. It's fun because I get to hang out with all of the older players," he said.

Ian kept score for the CNMI gold medal team in the past Pacific Games held in New Caledonia and did the same for the CNMI's 2010 Micronesian Games silver medal team that traveled to Palau.

His service played a significant role in the teams' successes because he provided up to the minute stats that helped the coaching staff make important game-time decisions.

Aside from baseball, Ian also enjoys playing basketball, volleyball, golf, and tackle football. He would like to continue his baseball career into the college ranks in hopes to use his talent on the field to help obtain a culinary degree. That's right, Ian is thinking of becoming a chef. He once won a class project competition with a self-made instructional cooking video. One of his favorite channels? The Food Network.

FAST FACTS

Name:	Ian Rogolifoi
Age:	15
Birthday:	September 1, 1996
Height:	5'9"
Weight:	220 lbs
Parents:	Tony and Rose Rogolifoi
Siblings:	Tony Boy, Chester, Peter, Reggie, Tara, Heidi, Melinda
Village:	Koblerville
School:	Saipan Southern High School
Hobbies:	Cooking, volleyball, basketball, and football
Favorite brands:	New Balance and Mizuno

Jeraldine Castillo mixes it up

WALTER CEPEDA SUTHERLAND
TAGA *Sports* Staff Writer

Don't ask Jeraldine Castillo to choose between basketball and soccer; she loves playing both sports so much she can't tell which one is her favorite.

Castillo has only been playing basketball for a little over a year but has already blossomed into one of the Lady Dolphins' most promising athletes. She also enjoys playing soccer and is shining as a fast learner in that sport as well.

She started playing soccer less than a year ago and plays for Shirley's Soccer Club's U15 and U18 women's squads as a forward in NMI Football Association leagues.

She picked up sports from her older sister Jeralyn, a junior at MHS, and credits her as the main source of her inspiration. A late bloomer, Castillo started playing sports when she attended Hopwood Junior High School and stipulated that she really does it simply for fun.

"I guess I like Kobe Bryant and the Lakers, but I don't really follow the superstars on television. Of course winning feels great and all, but I just play for the fun of it," she said.

In basketball, she displays natural ball-handling skills coupled with agile footwork and has developed a nice shooting motion.

Castillo was selected by the Basketball Association of the NMI to represent the CNMI in the Children of the World Basketball Camp held in Istanbul, Turkey back in August 2010.

"I felt so lucky to get that opportunity and started focusing harder on my game when I came back home," she said.

Castillo practices three times a week with MHS, but she plays daily on her own

This past June, Castillo traveled to Palau to compete with the U15 CNMI national team in the Micronesian Basketball Tournament; the group fared well and took runner-up honors in the event.

"It was a great experience going to Palau. We faced some stiff competition and I was nervous when I first stepped on the court. I think we all were, but after the butterflies left our stomachs our team settled down. It was a lot of fun and we improved after every game," she said.

Castillo also recently traveled to Guam with the Shirley's Soccer Club to compete in an off-island event.

Castillo aspires to go to college upon graduation. "I really want to go to college. I am not sure where or if I will get to play sports, or what field of study I would major in, but I like to learn new things and I am young and still have some time to think about it," she said.

FAST FACTS

Name:	Jeraldine Castillo
Age:	15
Birthday:	February 20, 1996
Height:	5'1"
Weight:	110 lbs
Parent:	Emalyn Santiago
Siblings:	Jeralyn, Jerlyn, and Jerald
Village:	Garapan
School:	Marianas High School
Hobbies:	Reading, listening to music
Favorite Brand:	Nike clothes, Adidas shoes

CNMI DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC HEALTH
IMMUNIZATION PROGRAM

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Early Signs of Autism

Learn the Signs. Act Early.

Red flags to watch for from birth to age 3

Social

Children with autism may:

- Not share warm, joyful facial expressions, such as smiles by 6 months
- Not babble and coo by 12 months
- Not respond to their name by 12 months
- Use few or no gestures (e.g., does not wave goodbye, point, etc.) by 12 months
- Not play "pretend" games (pretend to "feed" a doll) by 18 months
- Avoid eye contact
- Avoid other people and prefer to play alone
- Prefer not to be held or cuddled
- Have delayed speech and language skills.

Behavioral

Children with autism may:

- Be very organized (e.g., line up toys or other objects)
- Get upset by minor changes
- Have odd movement patterns (e.g., flaps hands, rocks body, or spins self in circles)
- Have frequent temper tantrums
- Be overly active
- Purposely hurt themselves
- Repeat words or actions over and over
- Look at objects from unusual angles.

Other areas

Children with autism often:

- Are overly sensitive to touch, sounds, taste or smells
- Lack fear in dangerous situations
- Have an intense need for routines
- Have learning difficulties
- Lose skills they once had (for instance, stop saying words they were using).

If you have concerns about your child's development, contact your baby's doctor or call the Children's Developmental Assistance Center at **664-4830** for a free developmental screening.

Children with autism can learn, grow and succeed.

Early action is the key!

Big Steps for Little Feet

Division of Public Health CNMI Health and Well Being

CDC Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

Information adapted from the Center of Disease Control and Prevention, Learn the Signs. Act Early. Supported in part by project H25MC06112 from the MCHB (Title V, Social Security Act), HRSA, DHHS.

FAST FACTS

Full Name: Richard Andrew Macaranas Jr.
Birthday: Feb. 28, 2009
Height: 5'6"
Weight: 150
Parents: Richard Macaranas and Rebecca "Becky" Hemphill
Siblings: Christian
Village: China Town on Saipan and Long Beach, CA
School: Marshall Academy of the Arts
Favorite sportswear: Nike
Brand of equipment used: Taylor Made, King Cobra, Cleveland, and Oddessy
Hobbies: Golf, video gaming, and listening to music

RJ Macaranas

Swinging for the moon and stars

MARK RABAGO
TAGA *Sports* Associate Editor

U.S. mainland-based junior golfer R.J. Macaranas' dream speaks a lot about what he hopes to achieve in the sport.

"I want to win an epic match against the world's No. 1 golfer in a major championship," was his straight answer when asked by TAGA *Sports* about his ultimate aspiration as a golfer.

By the looks of it, this 11-year-old member of the Tiger Woods National Golf Team has what it takes to accomplish his lofty ambition.

By his own estimate, Macaranas has won a total of 64 tournaments since 2007. Of that, he counts his victories in the Kikor Golf Classic at Casta Del Sol, General Old Spring Classic, Bridgestone Fall Tournament of Champions, Heartwell Fall Challenge, Bridgestone Metro Summer Tournament of Champions, LA County Santa Anita Junior Championship, Ivey Ranch Desert Series Championship, Casta Del Sol Championship, Crosby Memorial Junior Golf Championship, and Desert Open at Indian Springs as his best performances.

These 10 tournaments don't even include his most memorable, as the Long Beach, California native lists the LA City Championship, U.S. Kids World Championship, and two times at the Future Champions World Championship as his most memorable campaigns "because of how I played and the presentation of the event."

He said he couldn't forget the LA City Championship because he had just turned 9 then and couldn't believe he won it all.

"The U.S. Kids World Championship is also a big favorite of mine because they organize the biggest and best events with opening and closing ceremonies, and seeing the CNMI flag there was something I felt so proud of, especially to receive an award at the Home of American Golf at Pinehurst Village," said the eldest son of Richard and Becky Macaranas, who both hail from Saipan.

He always gets a kick out of people in the crowd during

tournaments suddenly having quizzical looks on their faces after hearing on the public address that he is representing the CNMI.

"I am proud that I can represent the CNMI. At the U.S. Kids World Championship there is a Jumbo-Tron that shows all the flags. Then I would hear someone say where is CNMI? So, I would say it is on Saipan," he said.

This golf prodigy started playing the sport at the unbelievably young age of 3, when his father first brought him to the golf course.

"My dad asked if I wanted to go golf with him and I did. So I got golf clubs and used it as much as possible. I was taught by my dad and he has been the biggest influence on my game," he said.

Aside obviously from Tiger Woods, Macaranas also idolizes junior golfer Patrick Cantlay, who is from Los Alamitos right near Long Beach and is the No. 1 amateur golfer on the planet.

"I read his bio at a Banquet of Champions, followed him this year on TV at the U.S. Open and Travelers Championship as an amateur. He finished 21st at the U.S. Open and first among amateurs. He then shot a 60 at the Travelers Championship," he said.

As for the controversial Woods, Macaranas volunteers that he looks up to him because of his community work.

"Pro golfers in general do many fundraising for community organizations, but I like Tiger Woods the most because the Tiger Woods Foundation believes in college access for underserved youth."

With regards to school, Macaranas said his parents told him from the very start that his studies should always take precedence over golf.

"On the days when I'm in school, I have to study first, then I can practice. On days that I don't have an upcoming tournament I would only spend about two to three hours a day practicing and maybe have a day to relax," he said.

It also helps that he is part of the Tiger Woods National Golf Team. "A lot of people presume that being part of the team means I am a golf star, but membership on this team actually requires the best grades overall."

Taking his cue from his hero, Macaranas also volunteers for special events such as Earthday, Special Olympics, Nature Center Stewart, and Rachel's Challenge and takes part in several beach cleanups, feeding the homeless, and community pancake breakfast socials.

In his spare time, Macaranas usually just kicks back and plays video games and surfs the Internet. He also works on school projects like video game designing.

His advice to every would-be golfer is fairly simple: "Practice harder than anyone. Golf can be intense and it can be fun, there are many levels that you can achieve. It is a sport for a lifetime.

Besides golf, does he see himself pursuing a different career? "I think I would be practicing martial arts to be a ninja."

COACH'S TAKE

Father and coach Richard Macaranas

What's the best part of his game: Has dedication to perform well and has an excellent long game and good at chipping.

What part needs improvement: He needs to work on his short game and reading the greens.

RJ Macaranas, third from left, poses with Tiger Woods and the other members of the Tiger Woods National Golf Team.

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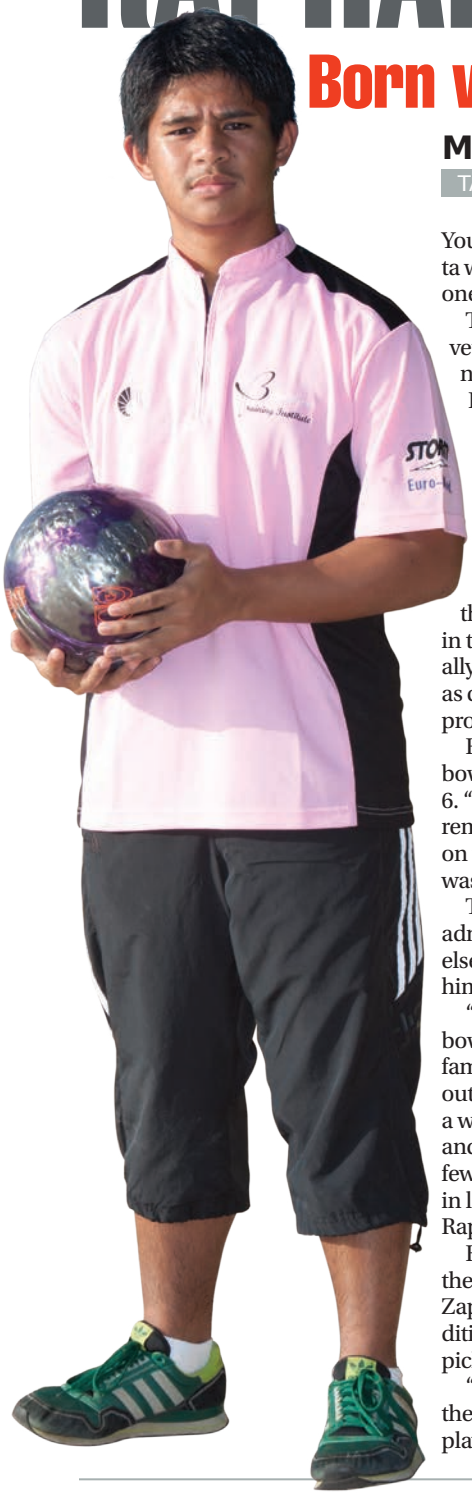
RAPHAEL ZAPANTA

Born with bowling ball in hand



MARK RABAGO
TAGA *Sports* Associate Editor

You could say Raphael T. Zapanta was born with a bowling ball in one hand.

The youngest son of bowling veterans and tournament organizers Ross and Gigi Zapanta, Raphael literally grew up in the bowling alley where his parents and two older brothers, Russelle and Raymond, excelled and won plenty of individual and team championships.

It was a no-brainer then that Raphael would take part in the family pastime, eventually making a name for himself as currently the CNMI's most promising 18-year-old kegler.

Raphael first picked up a bowling ball when he was about 6. "I was very young. I only remember just putting the ball on the lane and pushing it since I was still small."

The now 17-year-old Raphael admits that more than anything else, it was boredom that made him take up the sport.

"I was a bored little kid at the bowling alley and my entire family plays bowling so I tried it out. I kept on playing about once a week, every Saturday. I had fun and kept improving so after a few years, I started participating in leagues and tournaments," Raphael recalled.

His dad, longtime Office of the Public Auditor staff Ross Zapanta, agrees that familial tradition had a big part in Raphael picking up the sport.

"I think it was because all the members of his family are playing the sport that playing bowling seems a normal thing for him to do. Also, by the time he started, his two brothers were already very good bowlers and he was able to see them compete in Guam with other youth bowlers. He probably believed that he could also travel and compete outside the CNMI through the sport," he said.

Several hundred Saturdays with a smattering of Sundays and weekday bowling tournaments later, Raphael would hit pay dirt, winning his first major bowling tournament in January 2010 when he hoisted the championship trophy of the 2009 Fiji Water Prince of the Lanes Tournament.

"I was 15 years old at the time. I also won several monthly Prince of the Lanes but I would say winning the 2009 Annual Prince of the Lanes was my breakthrough win," he said.

Coming into the yearly youth competition organized by the Saipan Bowling Association, there was a lot of pressure for him to win it all. "The previous year I lost in the stepladder finals and only finished third place. Also, during 2009, I won 11 out of 12 monthly Prince of the Lanes tournaments—I did not participate in November 2009 because I was sick—so it would've been a big disappointment for me if I were to lose in the 2009 finals."

Aside from winning the youth championship, Raphael also counts his several flirtations with a perfect game as his most memorable.

He vividly remembers Jan. 8, 2009, as the day he bowled his best game and best three-game series. "It was the 26th season of the PBA-SBC Thursday Night League. I bowled a simple 200 my first game, but I was able to find my target. I was striking consistently during the second game and was thinking of maybe making a perfect game."

In between frames, Raphael played Rubik's Cube to relax his mind and that obviously had a calming effect on his nerves as he proceeded to roll 11 strikes in a row and needed one more to complete every bowler's dream.

"I needed one more. However, I made the mistake of looking at the other lanes only to notice that everyone had stopped bowling. That pressured me a lot more. My hand got sweaty and I tried to dry off as much as I can. Once I threw the ball, I immediately knew that I did something wrong and missed my target. I could only hope for some luck."

He said seven pins fell from the initial hit and then the No. 7 pin slowly fell, hitting yet another pin. However, one pin remained standing.

"My final score was 299. I was also able to bowl high third game with a score of 259, and finished with a three-game series of 758.

CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE ▶

FAST FACTS

Full name: Raphael T. Zapanta
Birthday: Sept. 26, 1994
Height: 5'5"
Weight: 165 lbs
Parents: Elsa and Ross Zapanta
Siblings: Raymond Zapanta and Ruselle Zapanta
Village: Dan Dan
School: Saipan Southern High School
Equipment used: Dexter bowling shoes and bowling ball brands like Storm, Ebonite, Brunswick, and Roto Grip
Hobbies: Soccer, futsal, and skateboarding

COACH'S TAKE

Ross Zapanta, champion bowler, Saipan Bowling Association official, and Raphael's father.

What's the best part of his game: The physical aspect of the game. Playing the sport seems very natural to him. He has the ideal approach, number of steps, slide, delivery, and hand control. Those are because he has powerful legs and strong hands. You can see how hard he can throw the ball with the necessary lift to make it rotate or spin. The rotation of his ball enables more pin action than the average bowler.

What part needs improvement: I believe it is the mental aspect. Bowling is a game that requires repetitive and consistent movement—the same pace for delivering the ball, the same ball speed, the same amount of lift for the ball. For that, he needs to learn how to focus continuously during long tournaments. He must also be patient and not be bothered even if good shots don't result in strikes. He should just maintain composure, pick up the spare, forget the previous shot, and prepare for the next. I think in general he just needs better instructions from a real bowling coach.

FROM PAGE 18

Even now, I still have a copy of the score sheet," he said.

Soon after winning the 2009 Prince of the Lanes, Raphael decided to graduate to the King of the Lanes even though he still had a couple of years of eligibility left in the youth league. He felt he had done everything there was to accomplish in the under-18 competition.

Today, he is a familiar fixture in the adult leagues and has represented the CNMI in a number of off-island competitions alongside his brothers.

When asked how he balances his studies with bowling since tournaments are usually played in the evenings, Raphael said it's all about budgeting time and prioritizing.

"There are some late nights when I had to stay there and I did use my spare time to do schoolwork. I try to use my time wisely as I wait. There were many times when I had to do homework, write essays, and study for tests. Most of the time, I would try to finish my work before bowling. There were also times that I stayed up late to finish schoolwork. I need to have good grades to continue to bowl because my parents always watch my progress in school," he said.

Ross and his wife never had a problem when it comes to Raphael's studies even with his increasing involvement in bowling.

"He spent his early years in a private school that was strict with regards to studying. At a young age he got used to doing homework every day. We just try to make him understand the importance of having a good education. We always tell him that sports is secondary and that if he cannot complete his schoolwork, then perhaps he should not bowl," he said.

So what's left for Raphael? He gamely answered that no less than a 300 game would satisfy his bowling appetite.

"One of my goals is to still make a perfect game. I missed that opportunity twice by bowling 299 and a 297. I still do not know when it will come. Another goal is to win a major tournament like the May Masters Tournament, Bowler of the Year, and other tournaments where I also compete with adults."

JEHN JOYNER

Midfielder for all seasons

MARK RABAGO
TAGA *Sports* Associate Editor

Five years of playing soccer and up-and-coming Jehn Berneser Harada Joyner has already made quite a name for himself on the pitch.

A quick rundown of the 5'11" midfielder's achievements on the soccer field includes four youth championships, three most valuable player awards, and three stints in the CNMI national soccer team.

Not bad for someone who picked up the sport relatively late.

"I started playing soccer when I was 8. I'm not sure why I picked it at first, but before I joined an actual league, I was playing soccer almost everyday in school during recess. My first coach was Mr. Peter Coleman. Playing for the first time in a league was pretty fun," said the Saipan International School student.

Joyner, who listens to his favorite songs on his MP3 player before each game, said the biggest influences in his soccer game are his family, coaches, and teammates.

"I can't choose only one, because they all help me. My family is always there to support me, my coaches always coach me well, and my teammates are there on the pitch with me playing," he said.

His coach in the four-time champions MP United, Norman Del Rosario, couldn't agree more. Everyone knows that Joyner is a really good player and a great soccer talent, but like all team sports it doesn't take one player to win championships, much less four straight (undefeated in two years).

"He is a special player because he is dedicated to the sports, he works hard and no matter who will be our next opponent he still puts in 100 percent in practice and in the game itself. Since soccer is a team sports, it makes Jehn special because of the support crew that he got. Most of his teammates right now are his teammates way back U6 so they grew up together and that's what soccer is all about—teamwork," he said.

Off the pitch, Del Rosario said Joyner is a very engaging and carefree person.

"Not so many people know that Jehn is a funny guy. He likes to joke around with his teammates. The team is close to one another and they basically go out together for movies, parties, or just hanging out," he said.

In the five years he's been playing the sport, what sticks out the most for Joyner is without a doubt the CNMI national team's 2-1 win against Macau during the 2011 East Asian Football Federation U15 Youth Tournament in Taipei, Taiwan.

"My most memorable moment on the soccer pitch was when I was in the U15 national team and we played in Taipei and we won the first time. I also scored the first goal," he said.

Joyner, who hopes to become a lawyer one day, said he has no secrets to being a good soccer player. "You just have to practice everyday and be committed to soccer. If you want to become a better soccer player, you have to work for it, practice everyday, and always enjoy the game."

He said student-athletes also should make it a point to prioritize their studies above all activities and make sure to finish their homework.

"I balance my studies while playing soccer pretty well. I play a lot of soccer then I just study afterwards. It's not really difficult, but most of the time, I sleep really late because of homework and studying," he said.

Among players on-island, Joyner looks up to Dae Min Jeon, Moon Bin Hong, and other players who play in the U18 league, "because they are amazing soccer players, and they are like older brothers to me."

Internationally, Joyner idolizes Cristiano Ronaldo of Real Madrid, "because he is really good at soccer, plays for my favorite team, I learn a lot of soccer moves from him, and I like his soccer cleats."

FAST FACTS

Name:	Jehn Berneser Harada Joyner
Birthday:	Oct. 9, 1997
Height:	5'11"
Weight:	140 lbs
Parents:	John Joyner and Yasuko Joyner
Siblings:	Jian Joyner
Village:	San Roque
School:	Saipan International School
Apparel of choice:	Nike
Hobbies:	Playing games, soccer, going on the Internet, sleeping

COACH'S TAKE

MP United coach Norman Del Rosario

What's the best part of his game: He is the player that keeps working hard (aggressive). He will try every possible way to win a game and make his team involved. His game really complements the team's strength.

SHANE ALVAREZ

WALTER CEPEDA SUTHERLAND
TAGA Sports Staff Writer

FAST FACTS

Full Name:	Shane Alvarez
Age:	18
Height:	5'7"
Weight:	145 lbs
Siblings:	Shanaiah and Alverick
Village:	Chalan Kanoa
School:	Marianas High School (2011)
Hobbies:	Water sports, video games

Shane "Pikaboo" Alvarez is an 18-year-old recent graduate of Marianas High School. For his age, he is perhaps the best mixed martial artist on Saipan in his weight class. For his size his ground game is second to none in the CNMI.

He holds a 7-1 record following his loss to Guam's Rob "The Real Deal" Wusstig (3-5) of Countershot MMA last December. In addition to being a former Trench Tech featherweight champ, Alvarez has placed on the podium in all six of Trench Tech's Art of War Grappling and Submission Challenges.

Although his career officially began at 14, Shane has been groomed to be a mixed martial artist since he was a little kid. He started formal training at 13 because, believe it or not, he was a chubby kid growing up and he wanted to get himself in shape. "After a while, I began to see the results of the hard work I put in and, at the same time, I really just started to like everything about the sport."

Alvarez is a natural-born competitor and he is also fortunate to receive tremendous support from his family. It's no news that Shane's dad, Cuki, is the head honcho at Trench Tech Purebred Promotions and that Shane has the luxury of Saipan's best MMA training facility at his fingertips. Still, it takes a lot of commitment and discipline to go out there and win and Shane definitely puts in his hours at the gym.

"My dad is my biggest motivator. He pushes me and always reminds me to keep my eye on the prize. I'm glad he does it too because that tells me that he really does believe in me," he said. Shane's late grandfather Ray was also a big source of inspiration.

His most memorable moments in MMA included his very first fight in Rites of Passage 4: The Uproar (2008) held at the old Trench Tech Gym in Garapan, his bout in Trench Warz 14: Ground Zero, which was held in tribute to his grandfather (who passed away earlier last year) and his recent title match in ROP 11: Onra, which he won over Derrick Rangamar (3-10) via unanimous decision after five grueling five-minute rounds this past September.

Shane started studying Brazilain jiu-jitsu as a young teenager and has since then sprinkled in kickboxing and wrestling into his skill set. He is considering taking the next step in 2012 to travel and face some off-island competition, perhaps in Guam, after which he hopes to further his MMA career stateside. Alvarez was invited by Frank "The Crank" Camacho as a potential recruit for the esteemed Lloyd Irvin MMA team in Camp Springs, Maryland. Shane is excited about the possibility of the opportunity and sees it as a dream come true.

"I want to make a career out of martial arts, and if all goes well, I will be learning from the Lloyd Irvin MMA pros soon," he said.

When he is not training you can find him on the beach at Sugar Dock, playing basketball, or playing video games. He likes the ocean and all kinds of water sports and enjoys racing and shooting games on Play Station 2. He was a former dirt bike racer in his younger years, but had to give it up to avoid jeopardizing his MMA career.

And what's with the nickname? It stems off a childhood nickname (shaney-boo), which he twisted into Pika-boo since "pika" in Chamorro translates into "hot" or "very spicy." It is catchy and maintains that little kid vibrance. TS

COACH'S TAKE

Trench Tech Purebred's Cuki Alvarez

"Since he's my son I am comfortable pushing him a little harder than most because I know he can do it. He really does have a strong work ethic and I always remind him to fight smart and use his head when fighting."

Badminton's Espana rises through the ranks

ROSELYN MONROYO
TAGA Sports Staff Writer

Three years ago, Rodwealth Espana was just a curious kid attending a badminton youth clinic. Now, the 14-year-old Marianas High School student is competing against the top class players in the Northern Marianas Badminton Association.

"My parents met some friends who play badminton so they told me to give it a try, so I joined a bunch of kids around my age in a clinic. That's where it all started and after that I asked the help of more experienced players and watched international players online to improve my game," Espana said.

Several months after the clinic, Espana joined his first tournament and was classified as a C player (the lowest level under NMBA's system of ranking). He then moved to Class B in less than a year and had a handful of wins against much older and experienced players. Last year, Espana was also allowed to compete in the A+ division (one step away from the highest level Class A) of the Shirley's Classic and was part of the NMBA coaches pool that assisted Oceania Badminton regional development manager Nadia Bleaken in conducting a youth clinic mid-2011.

Macoi Aguda, one of the experienced players who helped Espana with his game, said the MHS student worked his way up by practicing almost every day.

"When he was just starting to learn the game, he was consistently practicing. Eventually, he joined a tournament and gained confidence. He continues to show significant im-

FAST FACTS

Full Name: Rodwealth Pascua Espana
Birthday: January 12, 1997
Height: 5'4"
Weight: 173
Parents: Annie June Pascua and Rodelex B. Espana
Sibling: Heinrich Dingle
Village: Garapan
School: Marianas High School
Favorite sportswear: Adidas dri-fit and Nike pro sport shirts

provement after each competition," Aguda said. "He has a lot of skills now and it's up to him to use them to the fullest to become one of the top players on the island. Win or lose, he should continue playing."

To keep up his level of play, Espana wishes he could return to his old playing routine, which is three to four times a week.

"When I was doing that, I was moving a lot better, my shots were really good, and I was more relaxed. But now, it's hard to find a lot of time for badminton because of school commitments and other tournaments," said Espana, who is also into soccer, but hopes to represent the CNMI in off-island badminton tournaments someday.

"Who wouldn't go off-island to play the sport they really like? It will be an honor to play for the CNMI."

Rafael Jones

works on his game

ROSELYN MONROYO
TAGA *Sports* Staff Writer

Bleak is the perfect word to describe CNMI junior tennis player Rafael Jones' first competition. Bright is how his future in tennis looks after surviving a lot of hurdles and taking the sport seriously.

"I got killed! My first match was 0-6, 0-6. I started tournament play when I was 6. I think at the time there was a U8 division, so I was playing against kids two years older than I was," the 16-year-old netter said. "While playing tennis at 5, I was also into soccer, junior golf, and swimming. It was when I was 11 that I decided to concentrate solely on tennis."

FAST FACTS

Full Name: Rafael A. Jones
Birthday: September 18, 1995
Height: 5'7 1/2"
Weight: 135 lbs.
Parents: John and Flor Jones
Siblings: Shane (18), Emily (12), Angelo (15), and Michael (10)
Village: Mt. Tapochau
School: Saipan International School
Favorite sportswear: Adidas

After finding the sport that fits him, Jones rose to become one of the top junior tennis players, not only in the CNMI but also in the Pacific. He ruled the boys U18 division of the 2010 North Pacific Qualifying Tournament in Guam and was second in 2009. In the 2010 Pacific Oceania Junior Championship, the son of John and Flor Jones made it to the semifinals and eventually finished fourth in the 14-nation tournament. In local events, he won a couple of U18 competitions and then also challenged players in open divisions.

"You can see it all coming together for Raffy. He is now challenging the top men here on Saipan and with dedication he can be a fine college player," CNMI coach Jeff Race said of Jones' progress.

"Raffy and I have worked together since he was about 5 years old. It's funny because at one time he only hit slice forehands. I was on him to hit topspins and then he developed one with heavy spins. The last couple of years he has been working on a flatter, more penetrating stroke on that side. Also, his backhand used to be only slice, but his two-hander is now really reliable for him. His serve has become a major weapon and will continue to get better. As his game matures he will be a fine volleyer," Race added.

Jones owes his vast improvement to Race and his off-island training in Fiji and Australia.

"The training centers in both Brisbane and Fiji are regimented, so you have no choice but to train. A typical day starts at 7am with training until lunch, a few hours break and then another few hours of play in the afternoon. It is exhausting, but fun and certainly beneficial," Jones said.

It was also in Fiji last year where he first played in a Junior ITF ranking tournament, the same event former Pacific No. 1 player Ji Hoon Heo competed in.

"I look up to Ji Hoon. He was the best junior player on Saipan, won the POJC and is playing college tennis on a scholarship. That is just awesome. I also admire Coach Jeff. He is 50 and still trains hard with all of us. I still haven't been able to beat him in a tournament. I don't know if I will ever be as good as Ji Hoon, but I do dream about playing college tennis like him. I'm not at that level now and it will take a lot of hard work to get there," said Jones.

To start off one of his two remaining years in junior tennis, Jones is scheduled to head back to Australia on Jan. 1, 2012, and join the Pacific Oceania Touring Team that will compete in a series of tournaments. In June, he is aiming to defend his boys U18 title in the NPQ and then make it to the finals of the POJC in Fiji.

"The POJC is the one that I would like to win. I came in fourth in 2011 and I think I had a shot at third. I would love to win that tournament before I turn 18," the Novak Djokovic fan said.

Swimming's record

ROSELYN MONROYO
TAGA *Sports* Staff Writer

YANAI BROTHERS

With Rezne Wong concentrating on college swimming and Kai Staal about to follow him soon, the Yanai brothers—Ryuto, Hiroto, and Kaito—are raring to step up and make one entry after another in the CNMI's record books.

In the last two years alone, the Yanai siblings grew from being recreational swimmers to record holders. As of Nov. 19, 2011, 8-year-old Ryuto has three marks in the boys U8 division (50-meter freestyle, 100-meter freestyle, and 200-meter freestyle). Nine-year-old Hiroto also used to own records in the U8 age group before Ryuto broke some of them. Ten-year-old Kaito has seven records (400-meter freestyle, 200-meter backstroke, 50-meter and 100-meter breaststroke, 50-meter and 100-meter butterfly, and 200-meter individual medley) in the boys 9 to 10 to his credit.

The Yanai brothers swim for Tsunami Saipan Swimming Center and head coach Hiro Kimura believes the trio will continue to smash more records in the next few years.

"People in the CNMI should remember the names of Ryuto, Hiroto, and Kaito. They will represent the CNMI in international competitions in the future and they will crush more records," Kimura said.

The Tsunami Saipan coach added that more should be expected from Ryuto, who he said can be compared to a national junior swimmer in Japan.

"Ryuto's best time in 50-meter freestyle (33.85 seconds) may be ranked in the Top 5 in other countries' age group marks," Kimura said. "He has the strongest fighting spirit among the three and is always hungry for winning."

The fighter in Ryuto was what convinced him to try swimming at age 6, as he wanted to race against his brothers.

FAST FACTS

Full Name: Kaito Hollis Yanai
Birthday: August 14, 1999
Height: 4'9"
Weight: 85lbs.
Parents: Daisuke Yanai/ Ayumi Hollis Yanai
Siblings: Hiroto, Ryuto, and Kenshiro
Village: Garapan
School: Garapan Elementary School
Favorite sportswea: Mizuno and Arena products

Hiroto joined swimming not to compete against his siblings, but to be with them always.

"We are best friends, we love staying together in the pool," said Hiroto, who Kimura said is the most talented among the Yanai brothers and if his physique will continue to improve, he will go places.

Kaito, besides being the oldest among the three, is also the most accomplished. He

FAST FACTS

Full Name: Hiroto Hollis Yanai
Birthday: December 9, 2000
Height: 4'7"
Weight: 77lbs
Parents: Daisuke Yanai/ Ayumi Hollis Yanai
Siblings: Kaito, Ryuto, and Kenshiro
Village: Garapan
School: Garapan Elementary School
Favorite sportswea: Mizuno and Arena products

represented the CNMI in the 2010 Tokyo Sprint and won a gold medal in the annual competition.

These feats seemed impossible a few years ago when Kaito almost decided to call it quits.

"The training was so hard for Kaito that he almost gave up swimming. He didn't show up at the pool for a few days so coach Hiro visited him. After the pep

FAST FACTS

Full Name: Ryuto Hollis Yanai
Birthday: August 1, 2003
Height: 4'5"
Weight: 74lbs
Parents: Daisuke Yanai/ Ayumi Hollis Yanai
Siblings: Kaito, Hiroto, and Kenshiro
Village: Garapan
School: Garapan Elementary School
Favorite sportswea: Mizuno and Arena products

talk with coach Hiro he returned to the pool and regained his spirit," said Kaito's father, Daisuke.

Now, Kaito's life is swimming. He always thinks about his stroke and kick. He is very interested in techniques and wants to shape his body better.

Daisuke said that, like Kaito, his two other sons also cried because of the tough training sessions. But if every tear of the Yanai brothers means one record will be broken,

smashers

FAST FACTS

Full Name: Angel Marie Tan
Birthday: February 24, 1999
Height: 4'9"
Weight: 85 lbs
Parents: Glorybelle Tan and Samson Tan
Siblings: None
Village: Garapan
School: Grace Christian Acadamy
Favorite sportwear: Mizuno

the Kan Pacific Swimming Pool in Marpi surely has enough room for all their tears.

ANGEL MARIE TAN

Angel Marie Tan has Hotel Nikko to thank for her involvement with swimming.

"I was very fond of the water, so when I was 5, my parents sought membership with Hotel Nikko so I can swim every weekend," Tan said.

While swimming at the now closed hotel, one of the lifeguards began teaching Tan the basics of the sport. That same year, her parents enrolled her in swim lessons with Saipan Swim Club.

"I did short course races and did pretty good in some events, but after only a year I stopped swimming and returned to the pool when I was 8," Tan said.

Now racing for Tsunami Saipan, this former weekend swimmer has already produced records in two different age groups. The 12-year-old Tan has three marks (50-meter, 100-meter, and 200-meter breaststroke) in the girls 9 to 10. When she moved up to the 11 to 12 division, she managed to set five marks (50-meter backstroke, 50-meter and 200-meter breaststroke, 50-meter butterfly, and 400-meter individual medley) during her first year alone. For the past three years (2009 to November 2011), the Grace Christian Academy student has been the lone female swimmer to post CNMI age group marks.

"Angel is very talented and if she uses her talents to the fullest and practice more, she will make it big in international meets and compete against other countries' best swimmers," Tsunami Saipan head coach Hiro Kimura said. "In 2011, Angel broke several records of Xenavee Pangelinan, a legend in CNMI swimming history."

At the start of the year, Tan is keen to shatter records in the 200-meter individual medley, 100-meter butterfly, and 100-meter breaststroke.

As of November last year, the 100-meter butterfly is the oldest mark in the girls 11 to 12, with Pangelinan's 1:18.17 the record that has stood since Jan. 27, 1996. Myana Welch holds both the 100 breaststroke (1:25.40/Jan. 31, 2002) and 200-meter individual medley (2:46.09/Jan. 11, 2002) records (as of November 2011).

"If Angel surpasses a lot of Xenavee's times, she could be a legend too in the future," Kimura said.

MARK VENUS
Standout scorekeeper

WALTER CEPEDA SUTHERLAND
TAGA *Sports* Staff Writer

No, Mark Venus is not exactly a standout baller but his contribution to the sport is perhaps even more impressive. At 13 years old, Mark already works as a scorekeeper for four different leagues (Ratary, MISO, UFO, and MDX) and the Annual Settsu Friendship Basketball tournament.

Now an eighth grader at Hopwood Junior High School, Mark has been a fixture in the local basketball scene since he was 6 from following his dad, Abner, to the court. Mark's dad is an active basketball organizer for numerous leagues on island and the two share a deep love of the game.

When he was just 9, Mark began helping his dad tend to the shot clock during games. From there he graduated to managing the game clock and finally was allowed to be the actual scorekeeper. He even started refereeing some youth games when he was just 11. And of course when the games are done the kid gets his hands dirty and helps the cleanup crew shut down shop.

Mark does all of this virtually year-round, six times a day, and is really good at it too. Surprisingly, the 13-year-old kid really does a better job than most adults who are assigned to do the exact same thing. He rarely calls in sick and always keeps a positive attitude, even though he wishes sometimes that he could have more time to play like a regular kid.

What Mark may not know yet is that he is learning important skills that will prove to be a great value to him later in life. He has already developed an admirable work ethic, organizational skills, and an impressive volunteer work resume.

On top of it all, he has built a positive reputation for himself as just an overall genuine good person. There are a lot of kids (and adults) who cannot say nearly that much about themselves today.

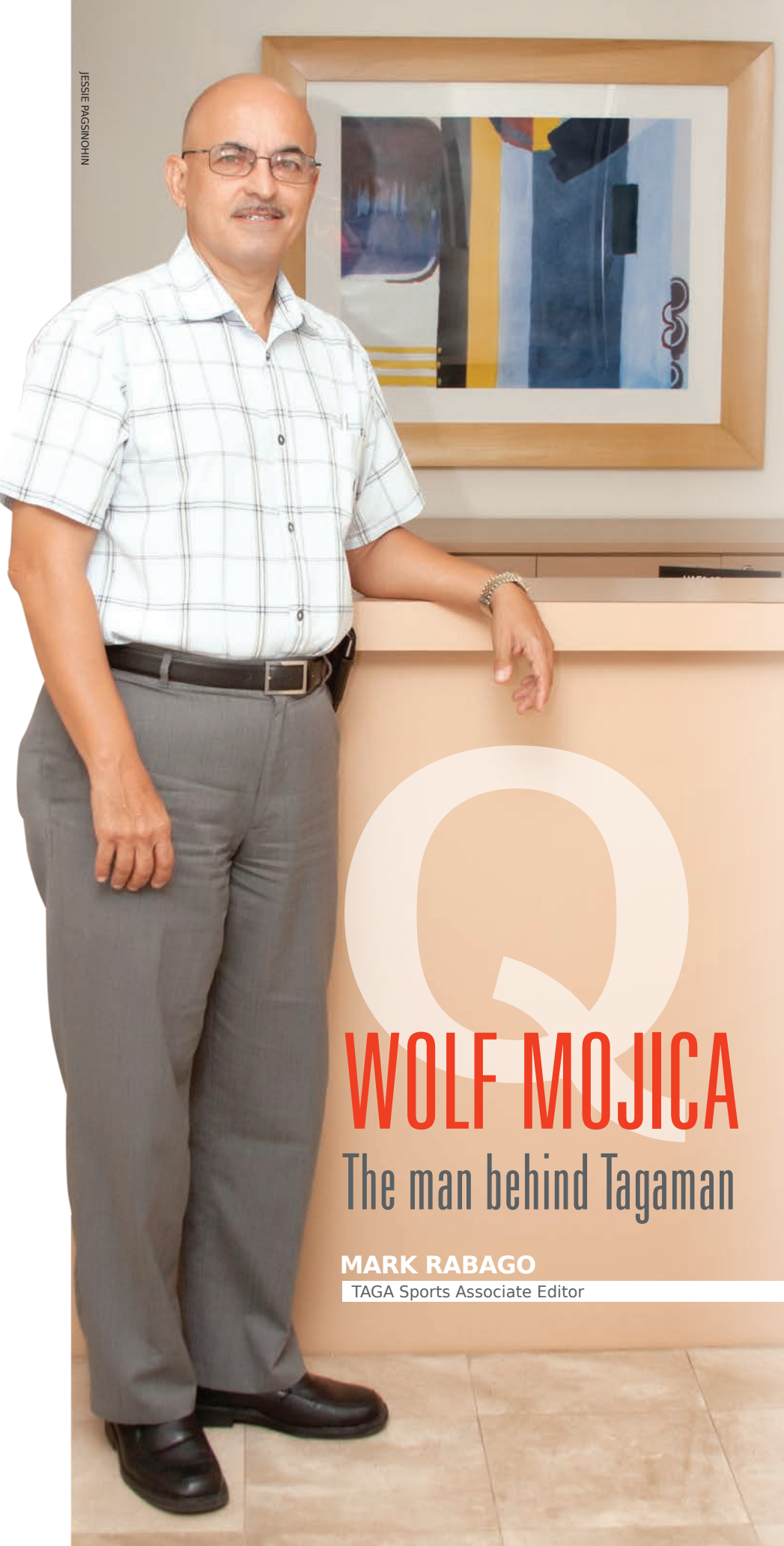
"I never really think about it like that, I just like to help my dad …and I have made a lot of friends at the court so that's cool too," he said with a shrug.

Mark, who has two older sisters and a younger brother, looks up to his dad and BANMI's Rex Yabut and basically takes after them and wants to referee like them when he gets older.

"I wasn't nervous until the game actually started in my first referee experience. I was afraid to blow the whistle, but Rex told me to relax and not be afraid of making a bad call. It was a lot of fun and I want to stick with it and keep trying little by little next year," he said.

The hardest part about the job? "You have to stay focused on the games and avoid being distracted."

He played shooting guard on the Rollers Basketball Club's Micronesian Brokers Inc. team in this past season's Ratary U15 division. He also enjoys playing softball for fun, but he really likes playing video games and playing with computers. His favorite NBA team is the Lakers; however, his favorite player is Derrick Rose of the Chicago Bulls.



JESSIE PAGSINOHIN

WOLF MOJICA

The man behind Tagaman

MARK RABAGO
TAGA Sports Associate Editor

Taga Inc. president Wolf Mojica has lived on Saipan the past 32 years and along the way helped form everyone's favorite hiking group, the Saipan Hash House Harriers, founded the Tagaman Triathlon alongside Bill Sakovich, J.M. Guerrero, and Yoichi Matsumura, and is currently the main driving force behind the region's biggest athletic event, the annual Saipan Sports Fest.

In this issue, the 58-year-old DFS Galleria Saipan assistant general manager liberally shares his love affair with the island, his passion for organizing events, and his sidetracked bowling career.

Q. What should we expect in the 2012 Saipan Sports Fest?

We should expect an exciting race. Sam Gardner will not be defending his title this year. His wife Susan is expecting their first child in March so he is going to be involved in a whole different sport while we are having our Sports Fest. This means that the men's field is wide open. We have invited Takahiro Ogasawara (he was second place winner) to be in the No. 1 spot for XTERRA. Olivier Marceau, a former Saipan XTERRA champion, is planning on joining us again, as well as Denison Freitas, a pro from Brazil who will be back for his second XTERRA Saipan.

I also invited former world champion Conrad Stolz and he will check his schedule. For the women, former XTERRA Worlds (and XTERRA Saipan) champion Shonny Vanlandingham is planning to return to Saipan but she had knee surgery in October. I saw her in Maui for the XTERRA Worlds and she said that, with therapy and training, she hopes to be able to defend her title. Renata Bucher and Carina Wasle are also planning a return.

For Tagaman we expect another big contingent from Korea this year and since Sam is not here, the men's field is wide open here, too.

Q. How do you find the time organizing the CNMI's biggest annual event—two triathlons—in a span of two weeks?

The company that I work for looks at this event as a premier event and my participation in organizing it as a community service. I actually take two weeks of vacation during the actual Sports Fest so that I can devote all of my time to the events. During the rest of the year DFS gives me a great deal of support and encouragement to get these events executed. DFS is also a major sponsor. And being on call 24/7 gives my schedule the flexibility I need.

Q. What's the most challenging part of organizing the Saipan Sports Fest and why?

The most challenging part for me is the actual marketing of the event. Although I come from a sales background, it is more face-to-face, one-on-one selling. This is entirely different, where you have to market a product globally.

The second challenge is the cost of getting triathletes and their bikes here at a reasonable cost. If you are doing both events, you need to bring two bikes (a mountain bike and a road bike). And although there are now two bike shops on Saipan, there are not enough bikes for the people to rent for the races and pros usually prefer to bring their own, sponsored bikes.

The third challenge is financing. The biggest sponsor of the event is the Marianas Visitors Authority and like all government agencies they have had to tighten their belts. And although we provide two events (XTERRA Saipan Championship and the Tagaman Triathlon) for less than they used to pay for one of the events, if you don't have the money, you don't have the money. We have had some great corporate sponsors here on Saipan , but if I had any hair, I would be pulling it out as we get closer to the event and we do not have all the money that we need.

Q. What kind of fulfillment do you get in organizing the Saipan Sports Fest?

The fulfillment I get is being able to put the CNMI and Saipan in particular in the world's spotlight. Almost to a person, the visiting athletes will tell you that this is the best race they have ever attended, even people from Guam. It is well organized, the course is world class, local hospitality is beyond anything they have experienced at any other venue. While I was in Maui I was approached by many athletes who were interested in coming to Saipan just because they heard what a great race it is (XTERRA) and the fun we have during the Sports Fest (between the XTERRA and the Tagaman). It gives me a certain amount of pride to hear that about Saipan. We have enough bad news of late and this is good news when people from all over the world are talking about us in positive terms. And I need to mention the landowners who allow us to pass through their property. This is so unlike most places in the world. They are so accommodating. And the volunteering spirit of the community is second to none here.

Q. How did you get involved in sports on Saipan?

I started jogging in the early '80s because I have always had a problem with weight—I love to eat. In 1984 I became a founding member of the Saipan Hash House Harriers. And although it is not a race, I got tired of being last all the time. So I began to run during the week to be able to keep up with the "big dogs." Around 1985 DFS assigned me to be the sports representative from DFS to the Marianas Visitors Bureau (the precursor of MVA).

Q. What was it like founding Tagaman and then eventually adding XTERRA?

My first assignment was the Saipan International Sports Fishing Tournament (I was actively on the committee for 25 years). My second was triathlon that J.M. Guerrero, Yoichi Matsumura, and Bill Sakovich were emulating from Japan. I believe they went to Miyako-jima and observed the race there and thought it would be a good idea to bring visitors to Saipan during the low season of mid-May. The rest I guess is history.

Because I do a lot of off-road running on the Hash, the people from Team Unlimited asked me if I could come up with a course for the first XTERRA Saipan Championship. I told them I knew a few trails but I knew a guy who was a master at trail setting. So I invited Tyce Mister to the organizational meeting and he had tree courses already mapped out on a topographical map. They chose one and that is the basic course we have today. I was involved with XTERRA after that only in the capacity of getting volunteers for the transition area and aid stations. About five years ago, TAGA Inc. took over from Team Unlimited and we still organize the event. Tagaman is in its 23rd year. I think after the 3rd XTERRA Bill and I decided we could combine the two and make a week of events including clinics, picnics, group swims, and Hash runs, so that the off-island participants could get a feel for the community here.

Q. What brought you to Saipan?

I came to Saipan in 1979 with Duty Free Shoppers (Now DFS Galleria Saipan). I was the manager of the downtown store (not the one on Beach Road now but a much smaller one in what is the luxury department now), which was torn down in 1988 when we built phase one of the current Galleria. I started working for DFS in Guam and was transferred over.

Q. What made you decide to stay here for good?

I had two of my four children born on Saipan and this was—and maybe still is—a great place to bring up children. Plus, I had a good job and business was good. And there is so much to do here, and the weather is great all year long, and the air is so clean, and the people are so friendly. On top of that there is no such thing as rush hour or traffic jams. And it is relatively safe here. And Saipan is visually a beautiful place and can remain so if we all do our part in cleaning up after ourselves and keeping our property clean.

Q. Aside from organizing sports, what sport do you play?

I go to Gold's Gym every weekday for cardio and some toning. Other than that, I walk on Saturday mornings and hash on Saturday afternoons. I used to take a group of DFS staff on hikes once a month, but we have not done that in a while. Truth be told, the only sport I enjoy watching with any regularity is bowling. Before I injured my hand I was a 175 average bowler. I remember years ago, I was at the Saipan Fitness Center on the treadmill and Russ Quinn would always ask me what the score was and I would tell him I was not even watching the TV. One day he came in and saw I was enraptured with what was on and it was the Pro Bowlers Tour, and he said, "Now I know what your sport is." It is true, but I can only play one game now and then my hand stops working. And most people here would not call bowling a sport.

Q. Any future plans for the Saipan Sports Fest?

Of course I would like the Saipan Sports Fest to continue. As long as we can get the money, we will have the events. My goal for the next five years is to get a corporate sponsor for the entire Sports Fest who can assist in bringing pros here, helping with airfares and accommodations. When you bring in big name pros, amateurs will come to the events in order to say they raced with them (like Lance Armstrong who raced in the World Championships in Maui).

Imagine being able to tell your friends you "beat" Lance Armstrong (if you were one of the 24 guys who passed him on the way to the finish line). I would also like to have a better relationship with the airlines so that we can get special rates on airfares and bike waivers. I would like to see XTERRA make 20 years and Tagaman 30. But most of all, I would like to find a protégé from Saipan who would be interested in taking over the reins of these fabulous events. Bill Sakovich, J.M. Guerrero, Yoichi Matsumuura, and I are not getting any younger and it is time for someone else to step up to the plate and show the commitment that we have shown over the past 25 years.

And just as Tagaman is the longest running triathlon in the Western Pacific, I would like the XTERRA to continue to be The Crown Jewel of XTERRA and a premier event that every one MUST do at least once in their lifetime.

CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

Frank Rosario

A well-rounded life

WHERE ARE THEY NOW?

CATHERINE R. PERRY
TAGA *Sports* Contributing Writer

Trying to put a finger on the place of Frank S. Rosario in Northern Marianas sports history is like tracing the path of Kobe Bryant doing a 360-degree slamdunk…a complete circle that few can match: athlete, writer, organizing executive, and fan.

A good place to begin is 1969. As the moniker "Super Bowl" was first being used in American football, half a world away tiny islands of the Pacific were launching their first regional games, the "Micronesia Olympics."

Rosario was fresh out of high school and newly recruited to play on the Northern Marianas national basketball team for the games. Unfortunately, the forces of nature were working against the home team that year. In 1967, a typhoon had knocked out all island power and had destroyed all sports facilities on island, except for basketball courts. Due to the devastation of the storm, organized sports had also been knocked off its feet.

"For one year we hadn't had games," Rosario recalls. "Then in 1969, prior to the start of the games, they were running around recruiting players like out-of-shape Frank. They recruited well-known athletes, swimmers, and track and field. We had baseball players, basketball players, volleyball players…they selected what they called the 'all-stars' to be part of the national team."

At 5'9" and 200 pounds, Rosario was a starter, playing both center and guard. Along with his teammates—he calls some of them to mind: Ignacio Demapan, Diego Blanco, David Aldan, George Camacho—the basketball team opened up the Micronesian Olympics with the inaugural game, facing off against Palau.

"I like to play guard. That's what I'm used to, and I can shoot a jumpshot pretty well from a distance," says Rosario. "At the time I was playing, there was no three-point line. Some of the points that I scored were definitely three pointers."

Nonetheless, the team struggled and finished third.

"I was proud to represent the Northern Marianas, but we were not a well-conditioned team," Rosario offers candidly. "If we had a well-organized team one year before the Olympics, we would've done better, we would've put up a good fight for the gold medal. Can you imagine Chuuk beating us? Some of my friends were giving me a

hard time, saying 'How can you lose to the other teams?' And they were right. Strangely enough, Palau got the gold in baseball, basketball. Chuuk got the silver medal in basketball and baseball, and the Marianas got the bronze in baseball and basketball."

Despite a lackluster athletic performance at the games, his first games still hold vivid memories for Rosario.

"The basefield field was good. Not as good as today, but very modest. The lone basketball court was outdoor in Susupe at the former Civic Center. There were no women's basketball games, because basketball was just starting. Volleyball was held outside the Chalan Kanoa Elementary School auditorium on a grass court.

"The track and field was pressed gravel. Our swimming pool was up at Garapan Fishing Base. They put ropes to divide the lanes where the boat ramp is today. It was very deep. I wonder what would've happened if it had been a windy day and seas were rough..."

Rosario's favorite recollection of the Games was a competitor from Pohnpei who drew quite a crowd and who was also the likely cause of Saipan's first traffic jam; both stirred up quite a buzz in the community.

"There was a guy from Pohnpei, Ishiro Hairens. He won four gold medals, all in track and field: 1,500 meters, 3,000 meters, 5,000 meters, 10,000 meters. He beat everybody as if those guys were not even in the race, I mean, he beat them badly," Rosario recalls.

"He became a crowd favorite. When he went for the 10,000 meters, they had to run all the way up from (the current Ada Gymnasium) to Garapan Fishing Base and back. He came in smoking, a cigarette dangling from his lips. It was just for show. That got the crowd going. Not only that, after running, like..." Rosario gestures to show the long distance, "...someone like me would've been dead from exhaustion, but this guy was making fun out of it! He would wait for [the last] 100 meters, then take off as fast as he could. Unbelievable. Barefoot, eh?

"Because of his accomplishments in the games, Pohnpei took him and entered him in a race in Japan, but he quit because it was too cold. And also, he was forced to wear shoes. I met him again in 1982. I wonder where he is now..."

Despite being an active player in high school and medaling in the Micronesian Olympics, it was only a few years later that Rosario hung up his jersey.

"The last time I played organized basketball was in 1972, when Papua New Guinea came with their naval ship, and they challenged a team from Saipan. Somebody called us up and asked us to play, and we got creamed. We lost badly, again, because there was no organized basketball."

It was about that time that Rosario began honing new skills for the next phase of his career: word play. He was working as an assistant public information officer for the Trust Territory government when the time came for the second Micronesian Games.

"I was sitting in the chambers covering the Congress of Micronesia when that conversation came up. The games were supposed to come every three years, but Congress did not appropriate money for the second games in Palau, so the games were dead."

In 1973 he was sent by the TT public information office to Fort Benjamin Harrison in Indianapolis, Indiana, for U.S. Defense Information School, a 10-week journalism course.

"I was the only Chamorro in the public information office, and I was sent to school to improve my English. I was the only civilian there; my classmates were Air Force, Marines, Army, Navy. Everyone came in with a uniform, and I walked in with my Hawaiian print shirt."

CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

The author, Catherine R. Perry, standing left, joins press secretary Frank Rosario, right, and Jeanne Pangelinan at the Office of the Governor during the term of Gov. Pete Tenorio.

During his TT tenure, Rosario contributed on "everything under the sun" to the monthly *Micronesian Reporter*, and went on to become bureau chief of the government-owned Micronesian News Service, the only region-wide news service of the time. During this time he also covered Micronesia's first participation in the South Pacific Games in Guam in 1975, simultaneously serving as public information officer for the Micronesia-wide Executive Committee of the SPG.

From his early beginning in with the TT government, Rosario's career then led him to the positions of manager editor of the former *Commonwealth Examiner* and as the Saipan bureau chief for the *Pacific Daily News*.

With the formation of the young Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, Rosario transitioned back to public service, serving on the Cabinet of three governors: press secretary and protocol officer for Gov. Lorenzo I. Guerrero and Gov. Pedro P. Tenorio, and special assistant for Micronesian affairs for Gov. Juan N. Babauta.

He was perfectly positioned to help advocate for the revival of the Games in 1990. By then, the Games had a new name.

"Somebody from the World Olympics wrote and told us not to use the word 'Olympics,'" he recalls. "It's like 'U.S. Congress.' People were of the opinion that we could call the local legislature, the 'Congress.' But there's only one Congress, and there's only one Olympics."

"Bill Sakovich, Kurt Banes, Mike White, [and] Bob Coldeen started discussing the second games. I told them, 'Go and find out if they're interested, and I'll ask Governor Guerrero to support it.' Bill went around to all the Micronesian districts at the time, and asked the leaders if they would support the Micronesia Games."

The Micronesian Games returned in 1990, with Rosario again taking on the role of public information officer of the executive committee. Sixteen years later, he also helped advocate for the return of the Games to the Northern Mariana Islands in 2006, after private sector financial pledges convinced the cash-strapped government to proceed with hosting the event.

"[Frank] was an above-average basketball player," recalls Kurt Banes, a key organizer of the first Micronesian Olympics and a constant figure throughout subsequent Games and Northern Marianas sports. "Frank was a stanch sports supporter. He understood the complexities of all sports. He attended every track meet that was held on the all-weather track at the Ada Gym and understood what good times and marks were."

Finally, after 26 years of government service, Rosario retired from public service in 2006.

Following a short stint as a correspondent for *Pacific Magazine*, he now finds time to enjoy wearing yet another hat, sports fan. From one season to the next, he closely follows the Los Angeles Dodgers, New England Patriots, and Los Angeles Lakers.

"I'm very bothered that the National Basketball Association has missed the starting of the games because of the labor dispute," he says. "I'm very disappointed."

These days Rosario spends most of his days in the coolness of his back porch, welcoming old friends and visitors for a trip down memory lane or a debate on today's newspaper headlines. His memory still sharp, he continues to be a wellspring of both official and behind-the-scenes history and a master storyteller of his own well-rounded life, including time spent hitting shots on the court, crafting the story on the newsbeat, planning for all possible contingencies involving hundreds of athletes in the meeting room, and watching the world go by from the comfort of his armchair.

ROSELYN B. MONROYO

Game, set, and match

ROSELYN B. MONROYO
TAGA Sports Staff Writer

In three years, husband and wife Kirk and Carrie Schuler accomplished many things they never expected to be doing on the islands.

"We came here in 2008, not knowing what to expect except the hot weather. It was a great experience and coming to Saipan gave us opportunities to excel in the sports we love and at the same time contribute to the community through coaching and organizing competitions," said Kirk, who left Saipan with his wife in October last year.

Here's a list (not necessarily in order) of the feats they earned either as a couple or individual and their insights on each achievement.

1 REKINDLED THEIR LOVE FOR TENNIS AND SOCCER

Kirk: I slowed down on competitive tennis for about a year after a torn ACL [anterior cruciate ligament]. A few months after our arrival on Saipan in September 2008, I became Ji Hoon Heo's hitting partner and later I joined different tournaments from 2009 to 2010.

Carrie: I was a club player for two years at Drake University, but then stopped playing after college. When we first came here, I started out with futsal and eventually played for MP United in women's soccer.

TAGA *Sports*: Kirk also played for Drake University in the NCAA Division I and gave Heo and coaches Jeff Race and Peter Loyola a run for their money. He also joined a couple of basketball leagues on Saipan, playing for CPA in the government caging and IT&E in the business league.

2 BECAME MEMBERS OF THE CNMI NATIONAL TEAM

Kirk: I was part of the CNMI National Team that played against Guam during the 4th Marianas Football Cup on Saipan in 2010. It was a great game, as we almost beat Guam and in the end forced a draw.

Carrie: I played for the CNMI in the East Asian Football Federation Women's Football Championship 2010 Semifinals Competition in Taiwan in August 2009 and was the captain during the 4th Annual Marianas Cup in 2010. I scored the CNMI women's squad's first ever goal in an international tournament during the EAFF event. It was one of my most memorable games with the national team, even though we lost to Guam, 1-5.

TAGA *Sports*: Kirk and Carrie were only the second couple to suit up for the CNMI national football team at the same time. The first ones were Rebecca and Jason Schroeder. Kirk started playing in co-ed futsal league before becoming one of the CNMI's solid football defenders.

3 JOINED CNMI U15 TEAM IN A HISTORIC TRIP TO TAIWAN

Carrie: I was an official with the CNMI U15 Team that competed in the 2011 East Asian Football Federation U15 Youth Tournament. We made history, as we won our first game in an international tournament after beating Macau, 2-1. It was a great experience to see our young team celebrate after the victory. It was as if we won the championship in the tournament.

TAGA *Sports*: In the CNMI's first three appearances (2006, 2008, and 2010) in the EAFF youth tournament, the Commonwealth strikers went home winless and failed to score a single goal.

4 COACHED MP UNITED BOYS U18

Kirk: It was tough coaching U18 teams as players in this age group can already make their own decisions during the game so your authority as a coach will be challenged often. With MP United, we have talented players so we just let them play their game and when we saw lapses, we didn't overact and shout hard. Instead we called our players, huddled, and pointed out the mistake and corrected them.

Carrie: We wish that MP United youth players will continue to improve their skills and someday they will represent the CNMI in international competitions too.

TAGA *Sports*: With the Schulers coaching MP United boys U18, the club swept the spring and fall seasons of 2010 and won the 2011 spring championship.

5 ORGANIZED TOURNAMENTS

Kirk: I was the tournament director for the Tan Holdings Tennis Classic for two years. It was a pretty difficult task, as you have to do all the draws and spend long hours on the court for two weekends to check that everything is okay. However, at the end of the tournament, I felt happy after seeing a lot of youth players, both from Guam and Saipan, competing and accepting their trophies at the awards ceremony.

TAGA *Sports*: Carrie assisted Kirk in organizing the Tan Holding's Classic and when they left a month before the third edition of the annual netfest, former CNMI Team members Bobby Cruz and Lydia Tan took over the tournament director chores.

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